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ABSTRACT

The six sections in this manual are: (1) Evaluation of Standards, (2) Implementation of Standards Through Accreditation, (3) Conducting the Agency Self-Study, (4) Contents of the Agency Self-Study Report, (5) The On-Site Review and (6) Translating Study into Action. The appendix contains coding instructions for sections C and D of this guide. (Other sections of the guide are available as LI 003343 through LI 003351). (Author/NH)

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SELF-STUDY AND EVALUATION GUIDE | 1968 Edition

Manual of Procedures

NATIONAL ACCREDITATION COUNCIL
For Agencies Serving the Blind and Visually Handicapped
79 Madison Avenue
New York, N. Y. 10011

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List of Sections

The Self-Study and Evaluation Guide consists of 15 sections, of which this Manual of Procedures is *Section A*. The remaining sections are:

Section B:	Agency and Community Profile
C Sections:	Administrative Areas
C-1	Agency Function and Structure
C-2	Financial Accounting and Service Reporting
C-3	Personnel Administration and Volunteer Service
C-4	Physical Facilities
C-5	Public Relations and Fund-Raising
D Sections:	Service Programs
D-1	Library Services
D-2	Orientation and Mobility Services
D-3	Rehabilitation Centers
D-4	Sheltered Workshops (*see note below*)
D-5	Social Services
D-6	Vocational Services
Section E:	Individual Staff Member Information Form
Section F:	Evaluation Summary and Report

NOTE: *Section D-4* is applicable to sheltered workshops which are part of a multi-service agency. A separate guide has been prepared for sheltered workshops which operate as independent entities. This is the *Self-Study and Evaluation Guide for Sheltered Workshops.*

A separate guide has also been prepared for residential schools serving blind and visually handicapped children. This is the *Self-Study and Evaluation Guide for Residential Schools.*

The material used in preparing this publication was based on studies supported in part by grants provided by the Social and Rehabilitation Service, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D.C., demonstration grant No. RD-2406 S, and the American Foundation for the Blind, New York, N. Y.

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A

MANUAL OF PROCEDURES

I. EVOLUTION OF STANDARDS

Early efforts on behalf of blind Americans centered largely on sheltering them from the perils and stresses of everyday life. Pity and compassion were the motivating forces behind this approach. It took a world war and its aftermath to galvanize action on an entirely new premise: that the fact of blindness need not engulf every other aspect of a person's life: given the right kind of professional guidance and service, blind people can realize their full potential as human beings.

In the 50 years since World War I, the twin concepts of individual rehabilitation and integration into the sighted community have become the warp and woof of constructive work with the blind. Acceptance of these concepts, however, has not met with a uniform level of response. As in all fields of human service, there have been trailblazers and there have been laggards. Some agencies, firmly wed to the traditional attitude that blindness spells life-long dependency, have found it difficult to accept or act on a diametrically opposite premise. In other instances, it has been inertia rather than conviction that perpetuated outmoded viewpoints and practices.

It was against this background that, in 1962, the American Foundation for the Blind set into motion a plan designed to upgrade work with the blind so that the field might move into the mainstream of modern programs of community service. An advisory committee appointed by the Foundation to analyze the problem and develop proposals for its orderly solution recommended the establishment of an independent national commission to undertake the two-fold task of (1) formulating standards for work with the blind and (2) creating a permanent body to implement such standards through a nationwide system of voluntary accreditation.

Persuasive arguments supported these recommendations:

–The effectiveness of accreditation systems in promoting sound standards of practice had already been demonstrated in several professional fields: education, hospital administration and nursing care.

–To a steadily increasing extent, accreditation was becoming a criterion of eligibility for basic financial support in the form of grants from government agencies and philanthropic foundations, as well as purchase-of-service contracts.

–Accreditation was also being sought as a hallmark of quality by universities and professional schools in the designation of clinical and training facilities.

Nor was the idea of standard setting and accreditation altogether new in the field of services for the blind. In 1940 the American Association of Instructors of the Blind launched a certification service for teachers of blind and visually handicapped children. Three years later, the American Association of Workers for the Blind introduced a similar program for the certification of teachers of the adult blind. In addition, a program for public recognition of ethical administrative practices had been in effect for a decade, also under the auspices of the American Association of Workers for the Blind.

In the light of these and other considerations, the advisory committee's recommendations were warmly accepted. Thus there came into being the Commission on Standards and Accreditation of Services for the Blind, a carefully-composed body of 22 men and women of national

stature, professionals and laymen, whose interests and capabilities criss-crossed all sections of the nation, all types of services for the blind and virtually all of the major professional disciplines involved in such services.

A three-year timetable was projected for the Commission. Financial support for its work came in the form of grants from the American Foundation for the Blind, the Irene Heinz Given and John LaPorte Given Foundation, the Gustavus and Louise Pfeiffer Research Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (now the Rehabilitation Services Administration) of the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

The Commission (which came to be known by its acronym of COMSTAC) selected five basic aspects of administration and seven specific service programs. as the areas most urgently in need of standards. With the help of 12 technical study committees, whose aggregate membership comprised more than 100 experts and specialists, the Commission produced a body of standards in each of the selected areas. These were published in 1966 in *The COMSTAC Report: Standards for Strengthened Services.*

At every stage of their development, these 12 comprehensive documents were subjected to meticulous review by the top lay and professional leadership in the field of services for the blind and in related fields and disciplines. In the course of drafting their reports, the technical committees consulted hundreds of knowledgeable experts from coast to coast. Then, before final adoption of the reports, the Commission convened a three-day National Conference on Standards, attended by some 400 lay and professional leaders from all parts of the nation, at which each of the 12 documents was subjected to thoroughgoing scrutiny and evaluation. As finally published, *The COMSTAC Report* represented a distillation of the experience and thinking of well over 1,000 informed and concerned persons

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF STANDARDS THROUGH ACCREDITATION

Execution of the second half of the Commission's charge underwent a similar process of evolution, review and refinement. The Commission's proposals for the structure, financing and operation of a permanent body to initiate and administer a system of voluntary accreditation were enthusiastically endorsed at the National Conference on Standards and constituted an integral part of *The COMSTAC Report.*

With the completion of its dual task, the Commission went out of existence at the end of 1966 and, on January 1, 1967, having been duly chartered as a non-profit corporation by the State of New York, the National Accreditation Council for Agencies Serving the Blind and Visually Handicapped began operations. One of the Commission's final acts before dissolving was to insure continuity of leadership by selecting a number of persons who had actively participated in the Commission's work to serve as founding members of the Council's Board of Directors.

As successor to the Commission, the Council took over distribution of *The COMSTAC Report* and arranged for its production in braille, recorded and tape editions to supplement the original inkprint editions. That the contents of the 400-page volume met a keenly felt need in the field of services to the blind was immediately apparent; more than 2,000 copies of the various editions were sold within a few months after publication. The critical reaction in all quarters was highly favorable; even more significant, word reached the Council from all over the country that the standards were promptly being put to use in programs of agency self-improvement.

Grounded in the standards enunciated in *The COMSTAC Report,* this first edition of the *Self-Study and Evaluation Guide* is designed as a practical working tool to help agencies assess

their strengths and weaknesses and, with the help of such assessments, to plan for improved services in the future.

With the issuance of the *Guide*, the National Accreditation Council is simultaneously taking the essential first step toward building a membership of accredited agencies whose concerted action will provide leadership and incentive for strengthening all of society's organized efforts on behalf of the nation's one million men, women and children who are blind or visually handicapped.

The Benefits of Self-Study and Accreditation

Although the major purpose of issuing the *Guide* is to enable agencies to establish their qualifications for accreditation, the self-study which is at the heart of the process has independent inherent value as an evaluation and planning instrument for the improvement of services. When self-study is undertaken with accreditation as the goal, however, additional depths and dimensions accrue.

One is the validation of the agency's own findings by an objective group of professional colleagues during an on-site visit. The experience of having a program reviewed by qualified professional peers is also apt to produce fresh, problem-solving insights. Still another dimension is the public recognition bestowed by accreditation, a recognition which has a dual impact. It signifies not only that the agency's own services are of sound quality and deserving of public support, but that the agency, through its membership in the National Accreditation Council, is actively meeting its broader community responsibility of promoting the pursuit of quality performance in every aspect of service to the blind throughout the nation.

The Accreditation Process

To fulfill its mandate to secure the improvement of services for the blind and visually handicapped, the National Accreditation Council operates through two major program arms:

1) The Commission on Standards, which is responsible for refining and updating the basic standards incorporated in *The COMSTAC Report*, and for developing comparable sets of standards in areas not previously encompassed.

2) The Commission on Accreditation, whose charge is to formulate policies, methods and procedures for the granting, maintenance and renewal of accredited status, and to act on individual agency applications for accreditation.

A detailed statement of policies and procedures governing the operations of the Commission on Accreditation has been adopted by the Board of Directors of the National Accreditation Council. The statement is available on request. For purposes of this *Guide*, the relevant features are these:

Policy Positions

Within the framework of the standards adopted by the Council, which constitute the basic guides, an agency is evaluated in the light of its own stated purposes and objectives.

Not perfection, but perfectibility, is sought. Deficiencies in a basically sound program of service do not rule out accreditation, provided the agency is willing to remedy deficiencies and gives evidence of ability to do so within a reasonable period.

Nor is accreditation denied because an agency may have introduced experimental approaches which deviate from the Council's standards, provided such experiments are part of a valid research design whose results will be measured within a specified time limit.

Accreditation Procedures

The initial step in applying for accreditation is the agency self-study, conducted by means of this *Self-Study and Evaluation Guide.* On submission of its self-study report, the agency then requests an on-site review which the Commission on Accreditation, after considering the self-study report, may authorize, defer or deny. Should either of the last two actions be taken, the agency is informed in writing of the reasons therefor, and is advised on the steps it may take to secure a more favorable ruling at a future time.

To conduct the on-site review, a visiting team of three or more is appointed by the Commission on Accreditation from its panel of professionally qualified persons. In the manner detailed later in this section, the on-site review team assesses the validity of the agency's self-study report by means of direct examination of the administration and content of the agency's program. It then prepares a report of its findings and evaluations. A draft of the report is mailed to the agency for factual review; the agency has 15 days in which to make comments correcting any finding of fact it considers erroneous.

On consideration of the report and recommendations of the on-site review team, the Commission arrives at a decision based on a total evaluation of all the data presented. It then has the option of taking one of three actions:

1) To approve the agency for accreditation and award accredited status contingent on the agency's compliance with all other requirements for membership in the National Accreditation Council.

2) To postpone final action, specifying the reasons for its decision and outlining the steps the agency may take to remove obstacles in the way of accreditation.

3) To deny accredited status, specifying the reasons for its decision and perhaps setting a date for reapplication.

Only affirmative action by the Commission–i.e., the decision to grant accreditation–is publicized in any manner. Publicity takes the form of inclusion of the agency's name in a published annual list of fully accredited member agencies of the National Accreditation Council; it may also take any other form of public announcement jointly agreed upon by the Council and the agency. All other actions are held in strictest confidentiality, as are all materials submitted by an agency in its self-study report, the findings and evaluations of the on-site review team, and any information acquired by members of the team in the course of the on-site review.

At periodic intervals (currently contemplated as not less than five nor more than ten years), accredited agencies will be required to undergo review for reaccreditation. A total or partial review of an agency may be required by the Council at an earlier date, however, in the event of a substantial change in the agency's program, organization or administration.

The policies and procedures adopted by the Council include a mechanism under which an agency that believes it has been unfairly treated with respect to accreditation may appeal the decision of the Commission. Such appeal will be heard only if based on the grounds that the Commission has arbitrarily or unfairly applied the Council's standards in arriving at its decision, or that the record on which the decision was based was inaccurate or incomplete in material respects.

An agency seeking accreditation is subject to the following costs:

–Payment of an application fee to the National Accreditation Council. Such fee is payable at the time the agency requests an on-site review.

–Purchase of copies of the *Self-Study and Evaluation Guide* and its individual sections.

–Reimbursement of the out-of-pocket travel and maintenance expenses of the members of the on-site review team. No payment is requested or made for the time or professional services of the team members; these are supplied on a voluntary basis.

—Upon approval for accreditation, payment of annual dues to the National Accreditation Council in accordance with the dues schedule enacted by the Council's Board of Directors.

III. CONDUCTING THE AGENCY SELF-STUDY

Whether the proposal that an agency undertake a self-study originates with the administrator (as is most often the case) or in the governing board, advisory board or other policy-making body, it is a step of major importance to the agency's future and, as such, should be made in conjunction with the agency's policy-making body.

The essential ingredients of a successful self-study are (1) willingness to invest the time, effort and expense entailed in carrying it through, (2) understanding and support of the study's purposes by members of the board, the staff and constituency, and active participation by many of these persons in the actual procedures, and (3) a conscious commitment to carry out, to the greatest feasible extent, any improvements which the self-study shows to be needed for strengthening of the agency's structure and services.

To achieve these objectives requires clear-sighted and creative leadership on the part of the agency administrator, upon whom devolves the natural role of coordinator and planner, irrespective of whether he gives personal direction to the study or delegates the responsibility to one or more of his associates.

The Self-Study Committee

Because of the multi-faceted nature of a self-study, involving as it does simultaneous examination of numerous aspects of agency administration and program services, the appointment of a self-study committee is well-nigh indispensable. Utilization of a committee not only helps share the burden of the work but contributes breadth of viewpoint and a healthy degree of objectivity. It offers, too, a valuable educational experience for all participants.

The obvious candidates for inclusion in the self-study committee are the key administrative, professional and technical staff persons involved in conducting the agency's programs. Members of the policy-making body add an important dimension, especially in those areas of administration for which the governing or advisory board is directly accountable. Representatives of the agency's constituency, and professional and lay leaders from the community served by the agency, may also make a significant contribution. This may be especially desirable in the case of the smaller agencies whose own staff and board would be supplemented to provide the scope and depth needed in the self-study process.

An efficient approach to the deployment of the self-study committee is to assign its members to subcommittees, each responsible for one or more administrative and service program areas. Flexible utilization can also be made of the specialized competence of individual members of the self-study committee through assignment of the same person to serve on several subcommittees.

As the work progresses, each subcommittee will be called upon to make at least one interim report to the total self-study committee and, on completion of its assignment, to make a final report. These reports will serve to keep the total group advised of the progress being made in the individual areas and will also afford an opportunity for correlation and reconciliation where interests overlap.

It may also prove desirable to appoint a small steering committee to assist in the overall direction and supervision of the self-study. Such a steering group might appropriately carry specific responsibility for executing those two sections of the self-study which entail a total

agency approach: *Section B, Agency and Community Profile*, and *Section F, Evaluation Summary and Report*. The content of these sections is described in ensuing pages.

Another key function for the steering committee might be to establish a tentative timetable for the study. Although the state of readiness for a self-study will necessarily vary from one agency to another, in most instances a period of from four to twelve months will allow reasonable time for both the factual investigations and for thoughtful evaluation of the agency's performance. A study process which takes longer than a year tends to dissipate its energies; it may also require going over the same ground more than once in order to keep the findings current.

Finally, the steering group's responsibilities might include assisting the full self-study committee to attain a consensus on any subcommittee reports that were not satisfactorily resolved by the subcommittee or that may conflict with the findings of other subcommittees. While there is no need for each subcommittee's report to be endorsed through a formal vote, in its final form it should represent the consensus of the full self-study committee. It is of real importance that general agreement and acceptance of the full self-study report prevail throughout the agency.

Initiating the Self-Study Process

As soon as the decision to conduct a self-study has been made, the first order of business is to obtain from the National Accreditation Council a bound copy of the full *Self-Study and Evaluation Guide*. This will serve as the agency's master copy for continuing reference; it will also show which, and how many, of the *Guide's* 15 separate sections will be needed as work materials.

Each section of the *Guide* (see inside front cover for list) is separately available. Generally speaking, the agency undertaking self-study toward accreditation will need the following:

Section A, Manual of Procedures: At a minimum, one for each member of the steering committee. Optionally, additional copies for the chairmen of the individual subcommittees.

Section B, Agency and Community Profile: A minimum of three, two for submission to the National Accreditation Council and the other for agency files.

The C Sections on Administrative Areas: A minimum of three each of these five sections, two sets for submission to the National Accreditation Council and the other for agency files. Optionally, additional copies for members of the subcommittees assigned to the respective sections.

The D Sections on Service Programs: A minimum of three copies of each section dealing with a service program provided by the agency, two for submission to the National Accreditation Council and the other for agency files. Optionally, additional copies for members of the subcommittees assigned the respective services.

Section E, Individual Staff Member Form: At a minimum, one for each member of the administrative, professional and technical staff, for submission to the National Accreditation Council. Optionally, a duplicate set for the agency's personnel files.

Section F, Evaluation Summary and Report: A minimum of three, two for submission to the National Accreditation Council and the other for agency files.

Working with Individual Sections

Section A, Manual of Procedures. Each member of the self-study committee will need to give this section a careful reading for a grasp of the overall self-study process and an orientation to accreditation procedures.

Section B, Agency and Community . ofile. This section, which centers on a statement of the agency's philosophy of service and program objectives, is an essential prerequisite to the development of all other sections. It will therefore need to be the first to be completed. As has been suggested, development of *Section B* might be an appropriate assignment for the steering committee, if such a group has been named. Otherwise, the formulation of the statement of agency philosophy and objectives might be assigned to a small task force whose membership includes the administrator, other key staff members, and one or more members of the governing body. The factual data also called for in *Section B* might be assembled by the same group, or assigned to a separate task force.

The C and D Sections. After carefully reviewing the contents of Sections *A* and *B*, the subcommittees assigned to complete the individual *C* sections on administration or *D* sections on service programs will begin by reviewing the *Guiding Principles* which appear in the introductory statements of their assigned sections. The subcommittees will then proceed to consider each standard and each evaluation question, and to mark them in accordance with the coding instructions (see below), using the space provided for *Comments* as indicated and appending pertinent supporting data where required.

An Approach to Coding

The inside front cover of each *C* and *D* section contains a set of coding instructions (reproduced herein in *Appendix A*). The purpose of the coding procedure is to minimize the task of writing out the factual and evaluative data which constitute the heart of the self-study. The instructions have been made as clear and specific as possible; they do not, however, lend themselves to routine or automatic handling. An essential precaution, therefore, is to make sure that all subcommittees interpret the instructions in the same way, in order that a uniform level of evaluation may prevail for all sections of the self-study. In this connection, it is worth repeating that:

> –The standards against which the agency evaluates its performance are not aimed at theoretical perfection, but are keyed to realistic, attainable levels of performance.
>
> –The standards are not absolutes, but are to be weighed in the light of the agency's own philosophy of service and program objectives as set forth in *Section B*.
>
> –Eligibility for accreditation does not mean that the agency is required to attain a "passing grade" in all phases of its work. As previously noted, the criterion for accreditation is not the absence of all deficiencies but, rather, the existence of an affirmative attitude toward correcting weaknesses and the capacity to do so within a reasonable time.

Conceivably, differences of opinion may arise among subcommittee members with respect to a particular rating. It will be seen that provision has been made for this possibility in both the standards checklist and the evaluation ratings codes. If necessary, explanations of such divergent opinions may be set forth under *Comments*. Such differences will necessarily be brought out in the subcommittee reports to the full self-study committee, where open discussion may help to resolve them.

As the self-study proceeds, the subcommittees will find it necessary to refer to various agency documents: policy statements, administrative regulations, staff and client handbooks, service reporting forms, financial statements, job descriptions and qualifications, agency publications, etc. For the most part, it will not be necessary to submit such documents to the National Accreditation Council with the self-study report. Once they have been assembled, however, it will be well to keep them available for possible reference during the on-site review.

Finally, the objective of the self-study, improvement of agency services, will need to be kept in sight at all times. This will make evident the need for thoroughness, for accuracy and, above all, for candor with respect to both weaknesses and strengths, for it is in these that the greatest needs and opportunities for improvement will be found.

Section E. Individual Staff Member Information Form. It may prove useful to have the factual material in this section completed before the *C* and *D* sections are tackled, since many of their standards bear on professional qualifications of staff.

The "Grandfather Clause"

As a matter of practical necessity, the National Accreditation Council has adopted the following "grandfather clause" policy:

> "It is recognized that some personnel, even though lacking in formal academic qualifications, have been working in the field of services for the blind for so long a time that, by virtue of mature judgment and rich experience, they are making a considerable contribution. Indeed, in many instances such persons are the very ones who have sought and encouraged professionalization and staff development in the field of services to the blind. The continuing participation of such highly experienced persons is not ruled out in the National Accreditation Council standards, but it is expected that qualifications at currently accepted professional levels are to be adopted for present and future development of services so that substantial progress in service can be assured."

Both the members of the self-study committee and the on-site review team will be expected to observe this policy in the evaluations relating to staff qualifications. The Individual Staff Member Information Forms are to be used to assess the overall adequacy of preparation and experience of the total staff of the agency or of a specific service. The forms are not intended as a means for evaluating individuals.

Section F. Evaluation Summary and Report. This, the final section to be completed, might well be another assignment for the steering committee or for a special task force, since it entails both a global assessment of the agency's overall-performance and a projection of its future course.

The participation of the total self-study committee in establishing a general order of priorities for the initiation of changes toward improvement will be a creative experience in clarifying agency goals and will assuredly constitute a unifying and strengthening stimulant in the resolve to function at an ever higher, ever more effective level.

IV. CONTENTS OF THE AGENCY SELF-STUDY REPORT

With the completion of its self-study, the agency seeking accredidation will apply to the National Accreditation Council for an on-site review. Accompanying its request will be *two* complete copies of the self-study report. These will consist of the following completed items along with the relevant supporting data attached to them:

- *Section B, Agency and Community Profile*
- The five *C* sections dealing with administration
- As many of the *D* sections on service programs as may be applicable
- A *Section E, Individual Staff Member Information Form* for each administrative. professional and technical staff member. (Only *one* copy of the agency self-study report submitted to the National Accreditation Council need include a set of the completed *Section E* forms.)
- *Section F, Evaluation Summary and Report*

The application fee is submitted along with the request for the on-site review.

V. THE ON-SITE REVIEW

If, on examination of the self-study materials, the Council deems the agency to be ready for an on-site review, the Council's Commission on Accreditation will proceed to select the chairman and members of an appropriately qualified review team. These persons will be drawn from a national roster of specialists with professional experience in the field of services to the blind or in related disciplines and fields of service -- persons who have volunteered to give their time and professional services without compensation.

Each review team will consist of at least three members, so selected that, as a group, they offer a combination of broad administrative experience and the professional or technical competences involved in the programs conducted by the agency. In most instances, the team will need more than three members, depending on such factors as the size of the agency, the diversity of its services or the geographic dispersion of its units.

Scheduling and Arrangement of the Visit

Under ordinary circumstances, it will be about three months between the time an agency is accepted for an on-site review and the date the team makes its visit. During this period, the Council will arrange with the agency the scheduling and logistics of the on-site visit. The person selected to serve as chairman of the on-site review team will receive the agency's self-study report from the Council and, after studying its contents, will initiate direct contact with the agency administrator concerning the conduct of the on-site visit. A mutually agreed-upon schedule will make for maximum accomplishment with minimum disruption during the visit, which will ordinarily last three days.

Once the schedule has been fixed, the agency will proceed to arrange for accommodations and meals for the visiting team. Such arrangements will take into account the extensive tasks that members of the teams will face in the course of their visit. Consequently, comfortable accommodations near the agency will be selected over those entailing time-consuming travel,

and simple meals served at the agency or at a nearby restaurant will be preferable to the kind of elaborate hospitality which, however well-intentioned, is bound to encroach on the limited day and evening hours available to the team for completion of its assignment.

The agency will defray the cost of travel and maintenance for the team members. Any such expenses that have not been paid directly by the agency will be reimbursable to the National Accreditation Council, which will arrange for prompt repayment of out-of-pocket expenses of team members.

While these arrangements are being completed, the agency will be informed by the Commission on Accreditation as to what basic background materials it should send to the team members for advance study. Such materials will consist of basic factual data, such as the agency's statement of philosophy and objectives; excerpts from its charter, by-laws, articles of incorporation, laws or regulations affecting the corporate structure; a schedule of the agency's service activities, its facilities and their locations; an organizational chart and personnel assignment list if such are available; a copy of the latest annual report, etc. The bulk of this material will be included in *Section B, Agency and Community Profile* It may be convenient to reproduce sufficient copies of *Section B* to provide one for each member of the team.

Orienting Agency Personnel

One further step taken by the agency in advance of the visit will be to orient its entire personnel to the team's arrival and work schedule. This will be the occassion also to clarify to the staff what they may expect – and what will be expected of them – in their contacts with the on-site review team. It will be important for staff to understand:

- That the team members will be coming in the role of helpful colleagues, not as inspectors, critics or fault-finders.
- That the team will wish to listen and understand, rather than impose their own views, even though they themselves may be accustomed to doing things differently.
- That the team will be as interested in identifying the agency's strengths as in ascertaining its weaknesses.
- That the principle of confidentiality will be rigorously observed by members of the team.

Through this kind of orientation, the staff will be helped to see that the visitors have been been invited for the express purpose of assisting the agency to shape and fulfill its own goals. An affirmative atmosphere of free and constructive interchange will contribute to this result.

Pattern of On-Site Visit

So that many variables will enter into the patterning of an on-site review, that it is not possible to outline a detailed schedule. Generally speaking, however, the sequence of events will be approximately as follows:

Soon after arrival, perhaps on the evening before the first full day of the visit, the team members will meet to organize their work. This will include assignment to the members, individually or in subcommittee, to observe agency work in progress and to meet with agency staff responsible for the administrative activities and service programs covered in the agency's self-study. The schedule previously worked out between the team chairman and the agency administrator will serve as the basic timetable.

Before launching into their specific assignments, the team as a unit will meet with the agency's self-study committee for presentation and discussion of the basic data incorporated in *Section B, Agency and Community Profile.*

As a rule, the team members will spend most of each working day meeting with agency representatives and observing, and gaining first-hand knowledge of, the agency activities to which they have been assigned. In the late afternoons and evenings, the team will meet as a unit to consider the findings on the self-study sections reviewed that day, and to arrive at a consensus on them. By mid-afternoon of the final day of the visit, the team will have finished its review of all sections, and will then complete formulation of its findings for the overall report.

Since the specific task of the on-site review team will be to assess the validity of the agency's self-evaluations, it follows that the team's basic raw materials will be the various sections of the *Self-Study and Evaluation Guide* completed by the agency in its self-study. The agency's coded ratings will be weighed by members of the review team, who will have the option of confirming the rating or revising them, upward or downward.

The team will also examine with care the plans indicated by the agency under "Programming for Improvements" at the end of each section, and may offer recommendations for additions or revisions.

On the basis of first-hand observations, amplified by discussions with agency representatives engaged in the activity under review, the team members assigned to a particular section will prepare a report for final consideration by the team as a whole.

On-Site Review Report

The sum total of these individual reports, which will include commendations of strengths as well as recommendations for needed improvements, will constitute the basis for the team's overall report to the Commission on Accreditation. This report will be prepared in written form by the team chairman within two weeks after conclusion of the visit.

If time and circumstances permit, a brief oral report to the agency's self-study committee may be made by the team, or by the chairman alone, before the visitors depart. Whether or not this proves feasible, the agency will have an opportunity to see the written report of the team's findings before it is acted upon; as noted earlier, a draft will be sent to the agency for factual verification before the report is formally placed before the Commission on Accreditation.

VI. TRANSLATING STUDY INTO ACTION

As soon as the agency's self-study gets under way, and long before the on-site review team arrives on the scene, the constructive effects of the self-study process will begin to make themselves felt.

Traditional practices, reexamined in the light of objective standards, will be seen in a fresh way. Customs long taken for granted will be looked at analytically. Recognition that the sole reason for certain practices is that "they have always been done this way" will often lead to decisions for immediate change. Self-evaluation will infuse a new sense of vitality. The feeling that the agency is moving forward will free imaginative thinking, lift morale and fortify reslove up and down the line.

It is evident, therefore, that there will be no need for the agency to await the decision of the Commission on Accreditation before initiating some changes and planning for others. The process of pinpointing needed improvements and designating them for immediate, near-term or longer-term implementation will constitute a serviceable blueprint for planning and action.

The worst thing that can happen after completion of an agency self-study is no action. The momentum gained in the self-study experience should be employed to launch the agency into a full-scale program of progress toward its self-determined goals.

APPENDIX A. CODING INSTRUCTIONS FOR C AND D SECTIONS

Two steps should precede the use of this Section:

1. *Section A, Manual of Procedures,* should be read for an understanding of the overall framework and governing principles of the self-study and accreditation process.

2. *Section B, Agency and Community Profile,* should be reviewed, since it embraces the statement of the agency's philosophy of service and program objectives, an indispensable base for evaluation of its work.

* * * *

This Section is designed to convey an accurate description of the agency's performance in a particular subject area. Three elements are employed to achieve this: a coded *Standards Checklist,* coded *Evaluation Ratings,* and *Comments.* Each is explained below.

Coding the Standards Checklist. Each standard describes a provision, condition or characteristic found in an acceptable agency; checking off, through the appropriate notation, whether and to what extent agency practice conforms to the standard provides a factual base for the succeeding evaluation.

In the parentheses ( ) preceding the standard, insert a symbol according to the following code.

✓✓—The standard is fully met.

✓—The standard is partly met.

O—The standard, although needed and desirable, is not met, or is met to such a limited extent as to be virtually inoperative.

?—The applicability of the standard to the agency is questioned.

X—The standard is clearly inapplicable to the agency.

Coding the Evaluation Ratings. Each evaluation question poses a criterion for judgment. Careful discrimination should be exercised in arriving at such judgment, bearing in mind that standards are not aimed at perfection but are keyed to realistic, attainable levels of performance. While the ratings embrace such concepts as *excellent, well, satisfactory, poor,* etc., which cannot be specifically defined, a valid judgment can be formulated if the evaluator balances a) the requirements postulated by the standard, b) the agency's stated philosophy of service and program objectives and its community relationships, and c) the practical knowledge derived from the evaluator's own professional experience.

In the brackets [ ] preceding the evaluation question, insert the code letter that best describes the agency's performance:

E—Excellent. The agency meets the criterion to the *fullest* extent and functions *excellently* in regard to it.

VG—Very good. The agency meets the criterion to the *fullest* extent and functions *well* in regard to it; or it meets the criterion to a *satisfactory* extent (i.e., not full coverage) and functions *excellently* in regard to it.

G—Good. The agency meets the criterion to a *satisfactory* extent and functions well in regard to it.

F—Fair. The agency meets the criterion to a *satisfactory* extent (i.e., not full coverage) but functions *poorly* in regard to it; or it meets the criterion to a *limited* extent but functions *satisfactorily* in regard to it.

P—Poor. The agency meets the criterion only to a *limited* extent and functions *poorly* in regard to it; or it makes *no provision* for meeting a needed criterion.

M—Missing. The element identified in the question is missing, but the agency's need for it is open to question.

NA—Not Applicable. The element identified in the question does not apply to the agency.

Comments. Just as not all of the standards necessarily apply to all agencies, not all of every agency's activities are necessarily covered by the standards. The space provided under *Comments* should be used to note any important feature or characteristic of the agency's activity relating to the subject but not included in the standard. Such notations may be supplemented, if necessary, by supporting data attached to the end of the Section, or by cross-references to other Sections. Addenda and cross-references should be accurately identified by notation of the Section and standard to which they pertain. (For example, material attached to the end of a Section might be marked "Supporting Data, Section D-4, 2-1"; a cross-reference might be noted as "See Section C-1, 2.3.3".)